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DE RUEHKB #0216/01 0450356
ZNR UUUUU ZZH (CCY AD7E4FFD MSI7932 538)
P 140356Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6108
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTJF HOA

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 000216

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, AF/RSA, AND S/CRS
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [ASEC](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UN](#) [US](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: Darfur Security Update, February 8

¶1. (SBU) Summary: UNDSS characterizes the security situation in Darfur over the past week as "calm but unpredictable." The threat of carjackings persists, especially in areas with increased Arab militia activity, and there remains the possibility of military confrontation between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and non-signatory forces in East Jebel Marra. UNDSS is considering, in consultation with the local NGO community, measures to impede future vehicle thefts. End summary.

Darfur Security Landscape

¶2. (SBU) In its weekly security briefing on February 8, UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) officials described conditions throughout the region as "calm but unpredictable." In North Darfur, things remain quiet in El Fasher, while Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) continue to maintain a heavy presence in the vicinity of Kutum, Kebkabiya, and Mellit. Tribal fighting near Kebkabiya on February 4 resulted in a mobilization of Arab militia, though tensions have since dissipated with the intervention of community leaders. In Tawila, friction between SAF and SLA-Minawi elements (over police station manning and water point access) led to heightened states of alert and low-level confrontations on both sides, though their respective leaders have since ordered forces to stand down. (Note: A February 8 UNDSS ground assessment of Tawila concluded that the situation was sufficiently stable for humanitarian organizations to continue operating there. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) In South Darfur, UNDSS estimates that the most likely area of military activity is East Jebel Marra, where SAF troops have been reinforced for a possible attack against SLA-Abdel Wahid elements. UNDSS posited that the Sudanese government intends to clear East Jebel Marra of all rebel elements in its ongoing effort to control this strategic terrain, and advised NGOs to exercise extreme caution if operating in the area. There have also been unconfirmed reports, according to UNDSS, of Arab militia movement originating near Gereida and heading to North Darfur, which could create tensions as the armed group encounters the local and humanitarian communities en route. In separate conversations with S/CRS Poloff, UN officials speculated that the Arab militia displacement may be the result of high level discussions in Khartoum between Minni Minawi and the Wali of South Darfur to resolve the problem; UNDSS also reports that they were informed by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) that Minawi agreed to withdraw his soldiers within two weeks from Gereida and Muhajeria and re-position them in Sudanese government-provided camps outside of the two towns.

¶4. (SBU) Near West Darfur, UNDSS highlighted periodic fighting over the past ten days in and around Adre on the Chad side of the border.

In its daily report, the UN noted that on February 6, Chadian National Forces (FANT) engaged Chadian deserters who had joined Chadian Armed Opposition Group (CAOG) near Adre. UNDSS further noted that "this is the second act of desertion in a week by the Chadian military personnel. On 2 February 2007, a Chadian army Colonel from the Goran tribe deserted the service with an assortment of weapons and personnel and joined the rebel groups opposing the Chadian Government."

Carjackings Continue

15. (SBU) The threat of carjackings continues throughout Darfur and the rising incidence of vehicle thefts is further shrinking the already narrow humanitarian space. UNDSS highlighted at least three recent attempted or successful carjackings within the previous two days, noting that there has been a steady trend of thefts taking place within internally displaced person (IDP) camps and inside NGO compounds. Based on its own analysis and input from the NGO community, UNDSS assesses that the rise in carjackings is most likely attributable to either: (a) armed groups (any affiliation) deliberately targeting NGO vehicles to increase their transportation capacity, perhaps in advance of renewed military operations; or (b) criminal elements or bandits exploiting a security vacuum in many parts of Darfur - particularly in IDP camps where there is essentially no AMIS presence - for economic gain. With fewer humanitarian agencies operating in the field and using the roads, carjackers can no longer wait for the vehicles to come to them; they appear to be more willing to break into NGO compounds to access the vehicles directly.

16. (SBU) In consultation with the humanitarian community, UNDSS is considering a variety of means to counter the threat of carjackings. The UN is lobbying AMIS to increase its presence in and around IDP camps. It is also considering the possibility of coordinated "NGO convoys" where humanitarian agencies travel together to pre-arranged

destinations within a defined timeframe. Yet another option mentioned during the briefing was installing GPS tracking devices in humanitarian organizations' vehicles. (Note: UNDSS Chief Security Advisor Stephen Gluning met February 10 with the humanitarian community to discuss measures that might be taken to enhance vehicle security while at the same time not stifling humanitarian activities. Additional analysis on carjackings provided septel. End note.)

COMMENT

17. (SBU) The ever tightening humanitarian space in Darfur has become even more constricted with the rise in carjackings targeting NGO vehicles, though AMIS and PAE have also been victims. The most obvious implications of increased vehicle theft are a reduction in humanitarian agencies' capacity to move in the field and a corresponding increase in the transportation capabilities (and military capacity) of vehicle snatchers. Additionally, the rash of car thefts - compounded by frequent Sudanese government harassment and erratic humanitarian access provided by armed factions - has stricken fear in many of the local NGO community, as evidenced by shrinking staffs and down-scaled operations. There are no silver bullets to address the problem. While the AMIS Force Commander indicated a willingness to increase patrolling near IDP camps, he can only spread his already-stretched Protection Force so far. NGOs continue to engage at the field level with local commanders to ensure both access and security, though this mechanism too appears increasingly unreliable as areas of control shift and banditry swells. GPS tracking devices, including models that allow remote ignition disablement, are an attractive option, but are costly (especially for NGOs operating on tight budgets) and susceptible to tampering. A combination of heightened awareness and defensive measures (such as convoys or increased AMIS patrolling) may be able to mitigate the carjacking threat in the short term, though insecurity - whether real or perceived - will continue to disrupt the delivery of humanitarian services throughout the region.